

autora demuestra, además, una extraordinaria capacidad para relacionar el cine español con otras artes, especialmente la pintura, y profundizar en aspectos históricos que aclaran en muchas ocasiones la globalización de cada obra. Un exceso de análisis de tramas o de acopio de citas no merma en absoluto un trabajo de erudición ímprobo que se complementa con una excelente bibliografía. Confirmando plenamente el juicio que hace de esta obra Marvin D'Lugo: «This is the most complete, in-depth, sophisticated study of Spanish cinema available in any language».

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CREACIÓN

Carlos Perellón. *La ciudad doble*. Barcelona, Anagrama, 1994.

There are three points of departure from which one may approach Carlos Perellón's *La ciudad doble*, the 1994 Premio Herralde (along with Pedro Zarraluki's *La historia del silencio*). The first and most general is the question of theme and structure, and the relation between the two. Second, as one would expect from the title, is the role of the city in the novel, in this case two cities: New York and Madrid. The protagonist, born and reared in the first city, accompanies his self-exiled architect father on his return to the second shortly after Franco's death. Thirdly, one must analyze the function of the autobiographical narration, its role in the text, and the credibility of the protagonist as narrator.

It may be helpful to work from the two particulars towards the more general question of overall structure. Unfortunately, in the mind of this reviewer, both are seriously flawed. Beginning with the role of the city and urban structures, it must be said that *La ciudad doble* rarely manages to overcome superficial and stereotypical limitations. When applying urban phenomena to novelistic creation, and in this case the author's chosen task is doubled —novelists are generally faced with one of two approaches. They either present unknown realities to the reader, in order to convert them into functioning actants within the novel, or they represent supposedly known realities to the reader in the hope of using that knowledge to create a functional bond between narrator and narratee. In this case, the author never defines his task. At times one is expected to

be acquainted with urban phenomena, whether in Madrid or New York, and at other times the narrator describes the streets or regions through which he travels, as if the reader were not expected to have any prior knowledge of them. This arbitrariness undercuts the credibility of the whole exercise, such as, for instance, when the narrator explains what the Puerta del Sol is, or that there is a McDonalds on the Gran Vía at the Red de San Luis, but expects the reader to be already initiated to the Malasaña quarter and Manuela, one of the more popular bars in that area. The reader is or is not an accomplice in the production of the text, but not both simultaneously. Curiously, given the fact that the novel is written in Spanish, this problem is less evident in those passages that take place in New York, where Perellón currently resides. The urban phenomena that are assumed to be new to the reader are understandably so, like Pomander Walk, which is generally foreign to people who do not inhabit the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The problem in New York, however, is the overabundance of clichés. Perellón rarely delves below the surface of urban cliché in this novel, leading the reader from Coney Island to a sordid midtown hotel to lunch in the Plaza and on to another hotel in the South Bronx, or from his Fifth Avenue apartment, where he dines on exquisite take out from the elegant Petrossian, to the wretchedness of the Lower East Side. Urban sites are two-dimensional, and used for their mythological or stereotypical value, rather than as real elements in the life of a character who tells the story of his existence in a modern city.

The Spanish reader, while possibly intrigued with Perellón's New York, may find his sojourn in Madrid less riveting, with its topical descriptions and lack of truly profound application of urban reality to the novelistic message. Madrid is painted in an almost equally stereotypical fashion, with trips to the Rastro, the Prado, Malasaña and Vallecas. Perellón would do well to compare his work with those of some of his immediate predecessors, such as Cela, Martín-Santos, García Hortelano, Marsé and Vázquez Montalbán, whose varied depictions of urban phenomena inject the reader into its reality and make it a vivid function of the overall meaning of the text. In *La ciudad doble*, Madrilenian urban scenes function more as topical ornamentation, a literary reminder of the radical changes that took place in Madrid in the early post Franco years.

With regard to the autobiographical form, the novel again poses problems. The number of texts written from the first-person point of view has grown markedly over recent decades, perhaps due to the growing influence of female authors, who often tend to write in the first person. But feminine writers often choose to narrate in this manner in order to create a new perspective on the society around them, as did traditional picaresque narrators of the literature of the Golden Age. Perellón's exercise seems to be much more narcissistic, very much in line with his narrator's ever present obsession with the sexual act and the conviction that women are constantly attracted to him. There is no obvious reader, nor is the direction of the narrative very clear, in spite of a basic linear chronology. The narrator is basically talking to himself, with all the narrative arbitrariness that logically follows.

The novel does possess a structure, which involves travelling from New York to Madrid and back, and there is an overall theme throughout the text: the narrator's development of an aesthetics of the ugly as a rebellion against the father's cultivation of beauty, combined with a veiled search for those elements of his past that his father kept hidden from him. But the overriding and arbitrary nature of the first person often subverts this structure, such as when the presence of the mother, which has haunted the narration throughout, appears and disappears fleetingly in a total understatement of what was taking on the aspect of a climatic passage.

The narrator's search for an aesthetics of ugliness in an interesting concept, at times presented in a fascinating manner, although the *esperpento* nature assumed by otherwise realistic description at times challenges the reader's willingness to suspend disbelief. This is the case, for instance, in the early scenes in Coney Island, which hark back to similar passages from Henry Miller or William Burroughs, and in sordid visits to the South Bronx. The narrator's constant questioning of traditional aesthetic judgement may well be seen as a valid postmodern or metafictional exercise that drives this novel towards its conclusion, and it may equally be seen as the novel's most original aspect, but this aspect is unfortunately not well supported either by the overall structure of the text or by its particular narrative elements.

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